

This special threat advisory is intended to provide situational awareness of threats to public order, public safety, and the security of public officials arising from violent online rhetoric opposing new and ongoing public health restrictions (Information current as of 17 January 2022, 1300hrs). The IMCIT continues to maintain visibility on emerging threats and will provide updates as required.

SPECIAL THREAT ADVISORY

ANTI-PUBLIC HEALTH ORDER: ESCALATION IN ONLINE VIOLENT RHETORIC

KEY POINTS

- The IMCIT assesses that violent online rhetoric opposing public health restrictions has escalated in tone, including threats made against public officials.
- Support and frequency of anti-public health order protests may grow as COVID-19 public health measures continue to impact daily life.
- Public order events outside personal residences of public officials are likely to continue.

BACKGROUND

Protests opposing public health measures have occurred since April 2020. Thus far, the majority of these events have been peaceful, however, some arrests or charges have resulted, including: assault¹, trespassing², and the issuing of tickets for violating gathering limitations or masking rules³.

CURRENT STATUS

The IMCIT assesses that new COVID-19 public health measures and the prolonging of existing restrictions have led to increasingly violent rhetoric appearing online within anti-public health order narratives. The IMCIT has observed an escalation in threatening rhetoric against public officials, including references to assassination, holding “Nuremberg Trials 2.0”^a, and conducting civilian arrests of those perceived to be involved in imposing public health rules. An escalation in the tone of these threats appears to be in response to the recent implementation of vaccine mandates for employment which has resulted in job loss in some sectors, announcements of the potential for financial penalties for

^a The Nuremberg Trials reference is in relation to a set of research ethics developed after German doctors conducted unethical human experimentation during the Second World War. It has been used by COVID-19 vaccine opponents throughout the pandemic to argue that vaccines violate the Nuremberg Code.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/no-covid-19-vaccines-do-not-violate-the-nuremberg-code-1.5576156>



unvaccinated individuals within Quebec, anticipation of required booster doses, and the continuation of public health restrictions including gathering and capacity limits, business closures and masking rules. While the majority of these threats are indirect, the IMCIT has observed an increase in the severity of threatening rhetoric online.

Additionally, anti-public health order narratives are gaining support from individuals who identify as being fully vaccinated and compliant with public health guidelines but have become frustrated over perceptions that, despite adherence to these rules, governments continue to impose restrictions across the population. The perception that a growing portion of the population are opposed to public health restrictions may further bolster the anti-public health order movement, some proponents of which claim that “united non-compliance” protest actions will apply pressure on governments to reverse public health measures. There are also concerns that lone individuals may be motivated to conduct acts of violence in retaliation against government-imposed restrictions.

Open source information indicates that protesters feel their lives have been disrupted by public health regulations and therefore want to disrupt the private lives of the decision makers they perceive are responsible. The IMCIT assesses that demonstrations outside the private residences of public officials are likely to continue, especially in response to new or enhanced public health restrictions. The following is a list of some of the demonstrations that have occurred outside the residences of public officials in recent months:

- 7 December 2021: Municipal Chief Medical Officer, Dr. David COLBY (Chatham-Kent, ON)⁴
- 9 December 2021: Municipal Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Heather MORRISSON (Charlottetown, PEI)⁵
- 13 and 15 December 2021: Provincial Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, Christine ELLIOT (Toronto, ON)⁶
- 14 December 2021: Municipal Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Sudit RANAD (Sarnia, ON)⁷
- 20 December 2021: Provincial Premier, Doug FORD (Toronto, ON)⁸
- 21 December 2021: Municipal Councillor, Karrie PORTER (Niagara, ON)⁹
- 21 December 2021: Municipal Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Mustafa HIRJI (Niagara, ON)¹⁰
- 1 January 2022: Provincial Health Minister, Jason COPPING (Calgary, AB)¹¹
- 6 January 2022: Provincial Premier, Blaine HIGGS (Quispamsis, NB)¹²
- 8 January 2022: Municipal Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Mustafa HIRJI (Niagara, ON)¹³
- 8 January 2022: Niagara Health CEO, Lynn GUERRIERO (Niagara, ON)¹⁴
- 9 January 2022: Municipal Mayor, Jyoti GONDEK (Calgary, AB)¹⁵
- 10 January 2022: Provincial Education Minister, Stephen LECCE (Vaughan, ON)¹⁶
- 12 January 2022: Municipal Councillor, Gian-Carlo CARRA (Calgary, AB)¹⁷
- 15 January 2022: Municipal Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Thomas PIGGOTT (Peterborough, ON)¹⁸

OPERATIONAL LIMITATIONS

Threats against public officials have been observed on both mainstream and fringe online spaces^b. Much of the violent rhetoric routinely occurs on platforms that offer user anonymity, which poses challenges for law enforcement's ability to positively identify users' actual identities. It is likely that a significant portion of ideologically motivated violent rhetoric occurring online remains undetected and unreported. The IMCIT continues to track and report on detected threats to law enforcement partners.

Issued by: Ideologically Motivated Criminal Intelligence Team (IMCIT)

Approved by: Director, Directorate of Strategic Intelligence, Federal Policing National Intelligence

¹ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8222011/assault-charges-anti-vaccine-protest-eaton-centre/> ; <https://www.cp24.com/news/woman-charged-after-assault-during-anti-vaccine-protest-in-downtown-toronto-1.5591874> ; <https://www.cochranetoday.ca/local-news/rancheview-school-anti-vaccine-protesters-charged-with-trespassing-3879407>

² <https://www.insauga.com/noted-anti-vaxxer-arrested-at-whitby-childrens-vaccine-clinic/>

³ <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/43-tickets-given-5-arrested-after-maskless-protest-at-b-c-grocery-store-mounties-say-1.5738858> ; <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-covid-19-news-today-ontario-broadens-vaccine-eligibility-at-some/> ; <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/one-arrested-and-57-ticketed-for-protesting-quebec-s-curfew-1.5725589> ; <https://www.kamloopsthisweek.com/local-news/maskless-members-of-anti-vaxxer-group-in-kamloops-arrested-fined-at-superstore-4943612>

⁴ <https://windsor.ctvnews.ca/protest-held-outside-chatham-kent-medical-officer-of-health-s-home-1.5698851>

⁵ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-protesters-cpho-home-1.6282708>

⁶ <https://www.blogto.com/city/2021/12/anti-vaxxers-protest-christine-elliott-toronto-home/> ; <https://www.insauga.com/crowd-of-anti-vax-rise-up-durham-members-harass-whitbys-christine-elliott-at-her-toronto-home/>

⁷ <https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/anti-mask-anti-vaccine-protesters-target-public-health-officials-home>

⁸ <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/ontario-premier-doug-ford-can-t-get-into-his-home-due-to-anti-vaxx-protesters-outside-spokesperson-1.5714974>

⁹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/councillor-medical-officer-of-health-protests-1.6295513>

¹⁰ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/councillor-medical-officer-of-health-protests-1.6295513>

¹¹ <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/crime/pawlowski-brothers-arrested-after-alleged-protest-outside-alberta-health-ministers-home/wcm/0ff4dca5-ed54-4eea-a148-eb1626fb16a6>

¹² <https://tj.news/telegraph-journal/101755596>

¹³ <https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news/niagara-region/2022/01/08/antivaxx-protestors-targeting-homes-of-healthcare-officials.html?rf>

¹⁴ <http://www.101morefm.ca/news/local-news/protesters-target-homes-of-two-of-niagaras-top-health-officials/>

¹⁵ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8500630/protest-jyoti-gondek-home-covid-19/>

¹⁶ <https://www.blogto.com/city/2022/01/anti-vax-protest-stephen-lecce/>

¹⁷ <https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/group-protests-outside-home-of-gian-carlo-carra-1.5738282>

¹⁸ <https://kawarthanow.com/2022/01/15/anti-vaxxers-show-up-at-home-of-peterborough-medical-officer-of-health-dr-thomas-piggott/>

^b "Fringe" platforms include websites like 4chan, which allows users to share content anonymously in an image-based forum without creating an account. Telegram is an encrypted messaging application which promises to protect user privacy and is known to attract violent extremist content. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/14/telegram-warned-of-nurturing-subculture-deifying-terrorists>

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